



# Wardheer News

NEWS FROM AFARI!

## The Floundering Presidency of Dr. Abdiweli Gaas

### Part II

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#### The Curse of Karma

Each culture or religious fortitude and its respective stoicism has a built-in Karma: if you did badly, soon or later it will come back to haunt you. In the Holy Quran, Chapter 7, Verse 7, we are told that “if you do

evil, you do evil to yourselves.” This is also in line with the biblical edict that: “for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap.” Add to this the Somali adage of “booraan hadimo ha qodin, hadaad qodana ha dheerayn ku dhici doontaana mooyee” or “don’t set up a noose, alas if you do so, don’t make it tight for you may be the one inadvertently falling into it,” and you



have a powerful bookkeeping for the universal law of Karma.

Karma serves us in two ways: it is a means of repository for what each and every one of us does; and two, it has built-in reciprocal punitive measures directed at those who committed bad deeds.

Dr. Abdiweli Gaas (Gaas) incurred Karma, or *inkaar* in Somali, following his political aggression towards his predecessors, particularly towards the late Adde Muse and Abdulrahman Farole. In 2007, paving the way for his entry into the political scene of Puntland, he wrote a

scathing critic about the state of governance in Puntland, painting it a macabre region “where offices are empty by 11 AM, infrastructure is “decrepit,” and a soviet-like culture exists where salaries are drawn in the name ghost personnel.

Under a take-no-prisoner baleful tittle, “Corruption in Puntland and Adde Muse’s Noble-Sounding Nonsense,” reinforced with vindictive subheadings like “Why they disappointed with the President,” followed by this spiteful “the goons in the Parliament,” Gaas dubbed his predecessors “criminals.”

In a litany of unfair criticism of the late Adde Muse and members of his administration, Gaas does not hold back, but calls them a bunch of “insulated politicians in the comfort of their villas that they seem scarcely to have even noticed the problem.” What is unremarkable about this criticism is that in 2007, Garowe did not have any villas to talk about.

To malign more, Gaas calls Adde Muse someone who “used and abused” the people of the region. “When I tried to address the people’s concerns to the few politicians I met, their responses reflected platitudes and clan prejudices, with little objective explanation of the state affairs,” writes Gaas. He adds: the presidency “was a test of his character, and he failed it miserably. He suddenly became the leader that lost his allure.”

To hit the nail on the coffin, he bites with venom like a vampire with a mission to rip off and replace Puntland’s leadership of the time: “The people of Puntland needed change but the President showed precious little action. The President himself ... became a rank opportunist,” who “failed to show real leadership,” and wasted his “enormous political capital to effect change,” he wrote about Adde Muse.

Without restraint common to academics, Gaas employs strong adjectives such as *Goons*, *thieves*, *criminals*, *abusers of the beautiful Puntland*, *rank opportunists*, etc., and shows no mercy in lashing out his harsh yet unsubstantiated criticism against Adde Muse. That is then.

Karma has befallen on Gaas and today all these adjectives are attributed to Gaas. Why was Gaas so quick to attribute these adjectives to others? One cannot help but retreat for explanation of his behavior to the theories of psychology of self-projection, where he projected his own attitudes onto others.

Like those he criticized, Gaas himself once had an “enormous political capital but wasted it” in favor of corruption and inaptitude and succumbed Puntland to sociopolitical stagnation.

Neither was Gaas kind to former president Abdulrahman Farole. His hyperbolic parable of the blight of Puntland being similar to a “beautiful young woman married and abused by a drunkard” still rings loud in the memories of many Somalis. He used profane language that is often off limits to Somali discourse, like equating a sitting President, in this case Abdulrahman Farole and others that came before him, to rapists!

In his criticism of his predecessors, Gaas did not cite any concrete evidence outside personal opinions; for example, he did not tell us how Adde Muse and A. Farole deserved such unkind treatment. To the contrary, my assessment hereafter about the floundering of his presidency would cite concrete examples of why I think Gaas is currently running a failed and corrupt enterprise.

### **The Puntland that could be**

Created in 1998, Puntland, besides Somaliland, is the first and oldest regional administration in the now fledgling federal arrangement; as such, it has played a decisive role in stabilizing the northeastern portions of Somalia. In its early days of existence, Puntland fought bitterly against religious extremists, defeated them, and subsequently secured the peace of the region without minimizing the role of peace-loving religious pious.

A trailblazer for the reconstruction of Somalia and the implementation of the federal arrangement which Somali leaders have by far agreed upon, Puntland has also shown that a Somali-led peace process is much more practical for the rehabilitation of Somalia than the heavy hands of many governments with disparate geopolitical interests.

To help revive Somalia, Puntland had hosted several pivotal conferences without which peace and stability could not have returned in Somalia. According to a report prepared by Puntland State University, “The historic Garowe I & II Consultative Conferences held at Puntland State University in February 23-26/12/2011 and December, 15-17/02/2012, respectively set the foundation for a unified federal system of governance.”

Despite past and present misgivings about a centralized power in Villa Somalia, Puntland is committed to a united Somalia. Although Puntland and Somaliland have had similar complaints about the military regime (1969-1991), they have different lenses with which they look at the prospect of Somalia’s future – that of Puntland seems a more forgiving approach with an unadulterated commitment to Somalia’s unity and its territorial integrity. As of writing this piece, Puntland youth and business groups donated about \$500,000 for the victims of the October 14, 2017 blast by Al-Shabab that killed over 300 and wounded about 700 innocent civilians. That is the best practical way to express the oneness of the Somali people and their organic unity.

Since its birth in 1998, a degree of progress has been realized in Puntland. Stability tops its gains. Cities and rural communities in the region are as safe as anywhere in the world. A local army consisting of Darawish infantry, police force and a modest coast guard have been in place. A functioning yet moribund executive and a decaying clan-based legislative branches have been in place for some time now.

The icing on the cake for Puntland's governance came on October 25, 2017, when its parliament convened the 40<sup>th</sup> session. At hand at the historic opening ceremony was the entire leadership of the two houses of the federal government. The delegation was impressed at the success of Puntland, and in turn assured to their host that they will take back real lessons learned to their dysfunctional and juvenile legislative houses in Mogadishu.

In January of 2014, when Gaas was elected for the president of Puntland, Hassan Abukar, a contributing editor of WardheerNews and an astute observer of Somali politics [wrote the cautionary tale that](#) "Gaas was once a prime minister of Somalia and, in his short stint, had accomplished a lot. Now that he is the president of Puntland, he will have more room to implement his political, economic and social program. He is, after all, the big fish in Puntland". (*For a different View point from Abukar's, [see a rebuttal by Ibrahim Sharmarke](#)*).

On the development side, concrete plans for road constructions have been designed; the Garowe statehouse was constructed; the port of Bosaso was renovated in 2012; improvements of airports in Bosaso, Galkayo and now Garowe are tangible projects. Several towns that were mere provincial towns in 1998 are today fast-growing semi-cosmopolitan cities.

Much of the credit of these gains goes to the collective Guurti leadership as well as to previous administrations dating back to the late Abdullahi Yusuf, Mohamed Abdi Hashi, Adde Muse, and Abdulrahman Farole, and to the current administration. It is noteworthy that some of the projects that are coming into fruition under Gaas, to which he deserves some credit for implementation phases, have been planned and designed prior to his arrival in the presidency.

However, this current administration's contribution is upset by some of the controversial deals surrounding the port of Bosaso coupled with a pervasive culture of corruption, and his total failure to take Puntland to the next level. (See [Puntland: The Sobering Trials of the First Year](#), a fascinating appraisal of the administration of Gaas by Abdelkarim A. Hassan, editor of WardheerNews).

Weak economic performance, joblessness, faltered democratization and a failed decentralization of services down to the local level are today the hallmark of Gaas' legacy. The promised multi-party system and free elections that were cornerstone to his campaign are not traceable. As Somaliland completes what thus far appears to be a yet another successful round of presidential election, [the floundered presidency of Gaas'](#) is stuck in a stale system of clan- based institutions. Puntlanders are today so embarrassed about failed leadership in their watch nothing short of a total paradigm shift both in leadership and in political arrangement can revive hope.

While Puntlanders seem to have great appetite for greatness and are ready to developing a well-functioning state government, Gaas has let them down. And this feeling is widespread among the residents of the region. In a recent visit to Somalia, I met many people from this region as well as the rest of the country who expressed to me a sense of grave disappointment in his administration.

There are three missed opportunities Gaas could have exploited to change the course of history. He could have made the concept of federalism more practical at the regional level by decentralizing power to the local and also sharing responsible governance with Villa Somalia. Unfortunately, so far he came short of showcasing to the rest of Somalia that bottom-up approach to governance and devolution of power is possible at the state level.

As a former Prime Minister of Somalia who oversaw the adoption of the draft constitution, he was in a unique position to understand how federalism works. During his campaign, he clearly articulated the horizontality and verticality of power-sharing in a federal system. Alas, for almost three years, he has not moved the needle one inch to decentralize governance in Puntland, or work well with the federal state. On top of that, he lost Sool, Sanaa, and Buuhoodle regions (aka. Khaatumo) and practically ceded them to Somaliland through sheer neglect.

Even so, he has turned down several progressive proposals in which he could have supported Khaatumo's statehood. Neither did he want to govern it or helped achieve self-governance; all he did to Khaatumo is sabotage it in every way possible!

As a result, these regions can no longer be claimed by Puntland by the virtue of clan association only. They are effectively governed, albeit without the consent of the majority of the residents, by Somaliland.

Second, he missed a golden opportunity to foster and enhance trade with the Somali State Region (Dawlad Deegaanka Soomaalida – DDSI). During his campaign, he boasted about how he would forge a robust trade with that region, where Puntland would export marine resources, mainly fish, to Ethiopia, while in exchange affording DDSI gateway for its livestock to the Gulf markets. As a former economics professor, he touted the creation of dry ports and enterprise zones, which would have in turn created badly needed jobs for the local people. To date, all those proposals remain broken promises.

The third missed opportunity, by far the most important, is that he could have made Puntland an all-Somali administration – inclusive of those who have settled there from conflict zones of Somalia. During the height of conflict in the rest of South Somalia, Puntland, thanks to the peaceful nature of its cities and towns, received thousands of internally displaced people (IDPs) from Bay, Jubbaland, Galmudug and elsewhere. Some of these IDPs made Puntland their permanent home. They established business and raised families. Those who settled there at a

young age or were born are today productive and tax-paying adults, and effectively contribute to the local economy.

Unfortunately, the administration on its part failed to represent these citizens in the government after a quarter of a century. Why? Because they don't hail from the kinship that "owns" the region is the lame rationalization often given by his admirers. In reality, though, some of the groups who took long term residence in Puntland could even be larger in number than some of the smaller sub-clans whose kinship is rooted in Puntland.

I personally reached out to Gaas to address this very issue with the hope that he, as an educated person, can appreciate the justice and the spirit of Somali unity embedded in such a proposal. I urged him to include in the government Somali IDPs inside Puntland - at least given them "an observer status at the parliament and allow them to fully participate in local governments," I suggested to him, but to no avail.

Why represent people from other regions in the government of Puntland, many may ask? Suffice here to give three obvious and simplistic reasons all of which are beneficial to both sides:

1. The thousands of people who settled in Puntland as IDPs pay taxes and as such need representation. This is an old concept in governance such that people who live in a geography and pay taxes need representation.
2. If representation was given to those who took permanent residence in Puntland, such move would have helped dilute the narrowly defined clan structure in Puntland. In other words, it would have diluted some of the critics, the likes (racist) of Faysal Cali Warabe who tends to associate Puntland with a clan rule.
3. A representation of other Somalis will make the government of Puntland a true and inclusive Somali regional government. Isn't that what we always request of Mogadishu – that all those who live in Mogadishu be represented in the local governance of the region. It is time we practice what we preach.

To wit, if Israel can have the sanity and political prudence to give Arab Israelis a role to play in their own governance inside proper Israel, in spite of fearsome feelings based on demographic tilts, there is no reason why a Somali region, Puntland for example, could not do the same for their southern brothers whose homes were destroyed and their families dislocated. After all, Puntlanders pride themselves as the "mother of federalism."

### **In Search of "the Mother of Federalism"**

If Puntland was the mother of federalism in the era that preceded this current administration, today Gaas' administration is the mother of sabotage of the federal arrangement. His administration has been moving away from the traditional concept of a federalist system of governance. Still reeling from his support for the botched camping of the reelection of President Hassan Sheikh Mahmoud, which he conducted secretly, he is out of the closet today to

unnecessarily confront the fledgling Farmajo administration. Whereas he seeks extreme autonomy from Villa Somalia, he refuses to take governance beyond Garowe. Worse, the parliament in Garowe has been reduced to a body that rubber stamps his political wish list.

Unforgivable of all is Gaas' determination to overstep his authority as a leader of a member state and regularly violate multiple provisions within Article 54 of the constitution, including: (1) powers to enter international treaties, (2) signing resource-related treaties with foreign governments, and (3) printing national currency. In the most egregious case, he argued that printing fake currencies, which in the long run may hurt his US citizenship, was within his powers. Moreover, independent of the Federal government, Gaas' "military projects are "extensively bankrolled by the UAE," according to Fair Observer, November, 2017, "which finances and trains the Puntland Maritime Police Force (PMPF) and Puntland's coast guard."

In federalism, leaders are expected to make efforts to narrow differences between the regions and the central government with the goal to advance the greater good. Gaas has so far shown tenacity to undermine that arrangement both at the national and local levels.

Every politician has his own downfall; that of Gaas is his attachment to the clan factor, on which he banked for the success of his meteoric political career. The oil that greases the squeaky clan elders so that they can deliver to him reliably and rapidly, is money, a lot of money! And there lies the root cause for Gaas' reversion to corruption and bad governance.

### **Corruption Culture**

Corruption, a product of less transparency and absence or weak accountability, is the use of public assets for personal aggrandizement. Corruption by definition is a criminal enterprise ultimately leading to the fleecing of public assets.

That is not how Gaas sees it. Rather, he sees corruption as "part of business transactions," when dealing with business. As an economist, he also understands that there is much incentive in not rejecting corruption for two reasons: First, in a country with weak rule of law, without corruption money, he many not succeed in politics; and second, with corruption, individual ideas and integrity do not matter. With that, he rationalizes that corruption is a tool to get to power.

In his emulation of the Trumpian school of thought, Gaas comes across as someone whose actions are devoid of the greater good, thus leading him to a culture of corruption and eventually a narcissistic world outlook. Many Somalis, international partners as well as the diplomatic communities inside Somalia are troubled by the behavior of the economics professor-turned a head of a criminal cartel. A newly assigned Ambassador to Mogadishu, who comes from one of the main AMISOM-contributing countries, recently asked me "he gets it when warlords destroy the country; but what is wrong with the President of Puntland?" I responded: I am a good friend of his and I too am baffled by his behavior. "Staying true to his initial statement that "corruption

is part of a business transaction,” many in Somalia believe that Gaas has sent Puntland to the abyss.

Gaas is one of a few leaders in Somalia accused of corruption; these leaders captured the attention of a Washington-based State Department-funded Non Governmental Organization (NGO) that is investigating corruption cases in Somalia. The agency follows the trail of embezzled money by leaders of those countries that receive US aid. Somalia is one of those countries. Some of the individuals that are on this NGO’s watch list include, among others, Gaas. How stolen money is laundered, and whether Hawalas are the venue is a prime concern for this NGO.

Here are three specific examples of corruption enterprises that are specific to Gaas:



- He is alleged to have signed several agreements with Chinese firms. They include firms to whom he gave substantial right for mineral and oil rights; the second agreements include fishing rights along Puntland’s coasts. A former officer in Gaas’ administration told me on anonymity that some of the monies he used to complete the Garowe airport came from Chinese firms. The bulk of the money from the Chinese, however, has been reported to the region’s moribund parliament.
- In April, 2017, DP World and Gaas signed a deal that would exclusively give the management and operations of the Bossaso port to DP World for a period of 30 years. Neither the Somali Federal Government nor a wide range of [stakeholder](#) in Puntland, including the well-established elders of the region, have been involved in the process. However, the moribund parliament have nominally endorsed the [transaction](#) by a vote of 59 against only one lone dissenting vote.
- Corruption money was given to each member of the 59 parliamentarians who voted for the deal. A sum of \$15 million DP World paid as a facilitation fee (commission) was directly surrendered to Gaas. The Dubai-based Hawala called IFTIN facilitated the laundering of the money. The technicalities of transferring the money was handled by the Minister of Finance of Puntland, Mr. Abdullahi Sheikh, and the Minister of Ports, Said Mohamed Rage. The money was transferred through IFTIN and was ultimately handed down to Gaas who distributed it in the following proportions:



	<b>Amount of Dollars</b>	<b>Disbursement</b>
<b>1</b>	\$2,500,00	for improving Garowe Airport
<b>2</b>	\$1,000,000	Road construction of Ceel
<b>3</b>	\$2,000,000	Distributed to Parliamentarians at \$28,000 per person
<b>4</b>	\$600,000	Used for a one-salary to civil servants
<b>5</b>	\$500,000	Attorney fee for drawing the contracts
<b>6</b>	\$400,000	Rewarded to an intermediary person who had helped secure the DP-Puntland deal
<b>7</b>	\$8,000,000	Unaccounted sum. Some speculate that this missing amount went directly to the pockets of Gaas

*This information was provided to me by members of the Puntland government*

- **Puntland Currency:** Forging new currency has always been a forte for Somalia’s notorious warlords of the 1990s. But the ante has been upped by an American educated economist who for the last few years have managed to print his own currency in defiance of both the Somali Federal Government and International regulations. A senior State Department told me this summer that Gaas represents both what is good and what is ailing Somalia – good in that he is a highly educated diaspora who went back home to “help.” But it is equally bothersome that he is behaving exactly “like a warlord” to the extent of violating both national and international laws. To the chagrin of many, Gaas admitted in his own words in several interviews that he had been printing false monetary notes for his region. One therefore wonders whether this case is being referable to Interpol and to the American FBI for two reasons: (1), the false notes he produces are often exchanged with US notes; and (2), Gaas is a US citizen and the crimes he committed are chargeable in US courts.

### **Political Follies of Gaas**

No Somali politician has shown the wishy-washiness as that of Gaas. In the winter of 2016, in a grandeur tour all over North America and Europe, Puntlanders positively responded to him and raised on his behalf about \$200,000. As a good will gesture, the money minus the expenses for the parties organized for him went to his pocket. In return, they expected of him to challenge the notorious 4.5 power-sharing;

In full-capacity auditoriums both in Minneapolis and Toronto, in front of thousands of enthusiastic supporter, he repeated a message of “nor more 4.5” in Somali politics.” Folks genuinely welcomed his stance for Somalia was in a critical transition – whether to move away from regressive political power-sharing of clan-based 4.5 or not. The nation as well as those who hail from Puntland took for his word when he affirmed his unwavering stance in the now infamous words of “I will not accept 4.5 anymore, even if Ban K-moon, the UN secretary tries to

twist my arms!” He added that his position was as firm as the proverbial aging sage a “Mudug man” who is known for his unrelenting firmness on his position.

Other Somalis who are non-Puntlanders also saw him as the vehicle to fight the corrupt 4.5 power-sharing. Little did they know, he was more committed to it than anyone in the political scene? However, now we know that all the hyperbolic language Gaas used was a cover-up for his servitude to former President Hassan Sheikh Mohamoud, with whom he had secret deals for the latter’s reelection, despite that his posture said otherwise.



Another major docility in the presidency of Gaas surfaced when a place called Garacad, a

remote coastal town in Puntland, was invaded by Al-Shabab. At the time of the invasion, he was in thick of grandeur North American tour. The invasion was the biggest and most threatening ever that Puntland has faced in its existence. A well-orchestrated Al-Shabab invasion overran and took over Garacad.

While still in America, Gaas was asked how soon he would be returning to the region to lead the effort to combat Al-Shabab. To the dismayed of many, he did not showed any urgency whatsoever. He stayed behind in North America after the invasion for about 10 additional days to take care of his personal business.

As if that was not enough insult, he went to Addis Ababa and spent over two leisurely weeks. By the time he returned to Garowe, the war ended and most of Al-Shabab militia were captured.

Nonchalant and perpetual absence from his base is a prime attribute of Gaas’. His absence and his global-throbbing trips were as matter of fact a silver-lining. “His mere absence during the Al-Shabab invasion may have helped us since his presence in the region may have complicated matters on the ground,” told me a well-respected Puntland intellectual who requested anonymity. That says it all!

In the last few months, a growing wave of political opposition has been gathering momentum in Puntland. Bossasso has emerged as the magnet for the region’s dissent voices. About three months ago when local elders challenged his policies of over taxation and politics of exclusion, he disrespected them and dismissed some of the key leaders in the region as a “bunch of disgruntled street people.” But things did not die there.

On November 2, 2017, major clan elders released a communique casting a doubt on his treaty with DP World on the leasing of Bossasso port. They called his move illegal and anti-national interest. The communique appealed to the federal government for its intervention.

I have yet to encounter a single Puntlander who would defend the presidency of Gaas with any serious effort. Most Puntlanders and others alike would tell you that they are extremely disappointed with him. Whether these wide spread dissension and opposition to him would lead to a meaningful change in the region remains to be seen.

All that we can say for now is that the Karma of the late Adde Muse and former president Abdurrahman Farole has visited on Gaas. To sum up the floundering of his presidency, some may simply borrow his own phrases and wonder whether his journey was “a test of his character,” in which “he failed it miserably. Others may simply pass the same judgment he had passed on Adde Muse and that Gaas “suddenly became the leader that lost his allure; he became a rank opportunist, failed to show real leadership, and wasted his an enormous political capital to effect change.”

In Gaas’ presidency, we see an inherent imbalance between gaining formal education in the West and falling into the trap of the culture of corruption. This imbalance has been common to an entire cohort of neocolonial elites mainly that of sub-Saharan Africa. It is a cohort that utilizes its knowhow to fleece an already flimsy and failing national or regional economies.

Moreover, Gaas represents an archetypical class of what the French called “evolue,” or “evolved class,” a term given to a kind of neocolonial elite whose color was African, but culture was otherwise in that members of this group developed an insatiable taste for expensive consumer culture, and corruption is the only path to finance that taste.

Dealing with the imbalance of being educated and corrupt at the same time is endemic to Somalia. In the case of Gaas, it is extreme.

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[Read Part I: Gaas and the Floundered Presidency](#)

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